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**LOTUS SŪTRA, LECTURE NO. 2**  
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**Zen Mountain Center**

**NOT VERBATIM**

[The *Lotus Sūtra*] ... which was told by a historical Buddha. But some people may be disappointed who believe in historical Buddha. This is not a characteristic of any religion except Buddhism. Only Buddhism went through a long history before having a complete understanding of the historical Buddha. It took a pretty long time for us to understand who he was.

At first his disciples were attached to his character, or to what he said and did. So his teaching became more and more static and solid. His teaching was transmitted by so-called Hīnayāna Buddhists, or *shrāvakas*, because they were the disciples, or followers, who tried to preserve his teaching by memory and discussion or meetings. No one is sure when this kind of meeting was held, but it is said that seventy-five years after his death they had a meeting where they chose various good disciples to compile his teaching.

When they discussed the precepts, Upali was the head of the group, and he recited what Buddha had said. When the Sutras were discussed, Ananda, who was Buddha's *jisha*, discussed what Buddha said. In that way, they set up some teaching: "This is what Buddha told us, and these are the precepts Buddha set up." Naturally, they became rigidly attached to the teaching, and, of course, those who studied this kind of teaching had a special position among Buddhists. Buddha's disciples were classified in four groups: laymen, laywomen, nuns, and priests. And the distinction between laymen and laywomen and priests and nuns became more and more strict. Buddhism at that time already had become a religion of priests, not ordinary people or laymen.

But when the meeting was held in the big cave, there were many people who did not join it. And there were many good disciples and followers among the people who did not join the meeting. Those people naturally got together and formed a group. That is the origin of the Mahāyāna School. So Buddha's followers divided themselves into Theravāda or *Jozabu* [or Sthavira] and the common followers, called *Daishu-bu* in Japanese [or Mahāsamghika]. *Daishu* means "assembly," a group of people or followers. Among them were many good teachers. One century after Buddha passed away, this group established an understanding of Buddha and his teaching. At that time the difference between the *Jozabu* and the *Daishubu* was not so great. But later, after Mahāyāna Buddhism was established, the other group acknowledged the more traditional and more fundamental teaching of

Buddha. That is actually Mahāyāna Buddhism.

I started this kind of long lecture to explain who spoke this *Lotus Sūtra*. This sūtra was supposed to have been spoken by the historical Buddha, but actually, what was recorded here is the Sambhogakāya Buddha, not the historical Buddha. Because this sutra was told by the Sambhogakāya Buddha instead of the historical Buddha, it is valuable.

Last night we had a very interesting lecture and discussion, and I was very interested in your questions and the lecture. How Buddha would feel about the idea of the *pratyeka-yana* or *shravaka-yana* is a very interesting question, I think. In my last lecture we explained what the Nirmānakāya Buddha is, and this morning I want to explain the Sambhogakāya Buddha, the one who is actually telling this *Lotus Sūtra*.

The reason I was so interested in the question of how Buddha may have felt about it was because Shākyamuni Buddha, as I told you in the last lecture, has two elements: Buddha as a human being, and Buddha as a superhuman being. The idea of the superhuman nature of Buddha is the result of a more emotional attachment to his character and teaching, which the Sravakas or Hīnayāna Buddhists had. This Shākyamuni Buddha who has two natures or two elements, the historical Buddha or the Buddha who incarnated to save others, and the more idealized Buddha, who is called the Nirmanakaya Buddha. But the Nirmanakaya Buddha is already not Buddha himself. If you think more about it, the historical Buddha is not Buddha himself. The historical Buddha became Buddha because he was enlightened in his true nature. That is why he became a Buddha. So without being enlightened in his true nature, the historical Buddha is not Buddha.

Here we already have a background for the historical Buddha. And even though that background was idealized so much as to reach the Nirmanakaya Buddha, there is also the incarnated Buddha. In other words, he changed, starting from a Bodhisattva, and became Buddha. So he is not true Buddha; he is always changing. "Who is changing?" is the next thing we should think about when we really want to know who Buddha was. To have, not just an emotional or romantic observation of Buddha, but also to more sincerely and deeply want to accept him as our teacher, it is necessary for us to know why he is Buddha.

If we are to get to this point, we have to have some idea beyond the incarnated Buddha, or Shākyamuni Buddha, or the Nirmanakaya Buddha. That Buddha is the Sambogakaya Buddha. The Sambogakaya Buddha incarnated into the Nirmanakaya Buddha. So the Sambogakaya Buddha is the Perfect One, and truth itself. When he is seen by people as truth, he may be a teacher. Even plants and

animals, mountains or rivers, can also be our teacher when we have eyes to see this. So when the historical Buddha has this kind of background, when he is elevated to this stage, he will be accepted as our teacher in the true sense. Not just in an emotional way, but we can accept him wholeheartedly as our teacher, because he is the one who is enlightened in the eternal truth, who has the strong background of the truth. And he is the one who taught us, who introduced this kind of truth to us. That is why he became Buddha.

He was enlightened in it, and he is the one who teaches us the truth he found out. Without this kind of background, Buddha could not have been remembered by human beings for such a long time. After Buddha was acknowledged as truth itself, then as long as truth exists and as long as we care for truth, we can remain as Buddhists. This Buddha is called the Sambogakaya Buddha.

The Sambogakaya Buddha is not the Buddha who will, or will not, attain enlightenment. He is the truth itself. But people may say the Sambogakaya Buddha is, at the same time, the Nirmanakaya Buddha. People see the truth in many ways, but the truth is always the same. Do you understand? If we understand his background in this way, that understanding is also the Dharmakaya Buddha, truth itself. For the Dharmakaya Buddha there is no need to attain enlightenment. He is already enlightened. From the beginningless beginning to the endless end, he is always enlightened. Only the Nirmanakaya Buddha attains enlightenment and becomes Buddha.

So for Buddha, after he attained enlightenment, to save others, or for others to help themselves, to be enlightened in himself or to cause other people to become enlightened, was the same thing. To help others and to help himself was the same thing.

To be enlightened does not mean to be aware of it. Do you understand? To be aware of it would be for him to observe himself objectively. When he attained enlightenment, that was being aware of himself. But to enlighten himself means to have confidence in himself, to accept himself as he is, to accept "that I am here". And, in this way, when you do not care for anything, you know that "I am here" already. That is the most important point, to stand on your own two feet before you observe yourself objectively. "Who am I, and what am I thinking? What kind of experience did I have? What kind of enlightenment did I have yesterday?" That is not true realization of oneself. To realize oneself is deeper than that kind of superficial observation of oneself. Before we objectively observe ourselves, we should be one with ourselves.

After Buddha discovered his true nature and knew exactly who he was, he attained enlightenment and became the Sambogakaya Buddha. He

became truth itself, one with himself and one with the whole universe. And he did not care for anything. He was completely satisfied with himself. And, when he became one with himself and with everything else, whatever he saw, everything had the same nature as he had. Just as he existed under the Bodhi tree as an enlightened one, as a perfect one, so everything existed in the same way. That is why Buddha said, "It is wonderful to see everything has Buddha Nature." Just as he is, so everything is Buddha, we say. But when we say this in its true sense, it means "I am Buddha."

Only when we stand on our own two legs can we help others. Before this, you are observing yourself, thinking, "Who am I? Have I attained enlightenment or not? Am I able to help others?" and you cannot help others. When you become just you yourself, without comparing yourself to others: "I am I. I am here. When you have difficulty, I am with you, and I can manage myself pretty well. If you like, I can help you," that is Buddha.

This kind of Buddha is the Buddha before we attain enlightenment. Without this confidence, you cannot even practice zazen. How can you practice zazen when you doubt, or when you are observing yourself objectively without having any subjectivity? How can you practice zazen? Only when you accept yourself, and when you really know you exist here. You cannot escape from yourself. This is the ultimate fact, that "I am here."

This is very true. Don't you think so? But still you doubt, and still you make a separation from yourself and observe yourself from the outside: "Who am I? What am I doing?" Zazen practice is not this kind of practice. Someone else is practicing zazen, not "you." "You" should practice zazen. That is *shikantaza*. That is the Sambogakaya Buddha.

Buddha's teaching is not the written teaching or something told by the historical Buddha. When the Sambogakaya Buddha, the true Buddha told it, it was Buddha's teaching—very much so. But when we read, we are trying to figure out what he told us, what was the true teaching, and what was the historical Buddha, Shākyamuni Buddha. We are, in other words, deeply attached to someone else, forgetting all about the ultimate fact that we are here. As long as we try to understand the real Buddha in this way, we cannot understand who he was. Anyway, to help others and to help ourselves is the same thing. To realize myself and to make others realize the truth is the same thing.

So the true Buddha is the Sambhogakāya Buddha, and when the Sambhogakāya Buddha does some activity, or is observed by someone, he may be the Nirmanakaya Buddha. Before the Nirmanakaya Buddha, there must be a Sambhogakāya Buddha. And

before a Bodhisattva appears to save others, there must be a Sambhogakāya Buddha as the strong background of the Bodhisattva. So every Bodhisattva and Buddha, and their activity of helping others, comes from this source, from this origin of the Sambhogakāya Buddha. And the Sambhogakāya Buddha is truth itself. So we have Dharmakaya Buddha, Sambhogakāya Buddha, and Nirmanakaya Buddha.

When we understand the *Lotus Sūtra* as the sutra which was spoken by the Sambhogakāya Buddha, or when we understand that, "I am now reading the *Lotus Sūtra*," then the *Lotus Sūtra* makes sense to us. If we lose this point, we will be turned by the *Lotus Sūtra*. If we realize this point, we will turn it. I said, "I am reading," but actually, I meant, "I am telling the *Lotus Sūtra*." So the Sixth Patriarch said, "When we are in delusion, the *Lotus Sūtra* will turn us, and people may be turned by the *Lotus Sūtra*. But when our mind is clear, we will turn the *Lotus Sūtra*, we will speak the *Lotus Sūtra* instead of Buddha." So, to study the *Lotus Sūtra* and to listen to it are not two different things. To read it and to talk about [tell?] it are the same thing. If there are various materials to talk about, then we can speak the *Lotus Sūtra*.

I have come to the conclusion already, but let us think more calmly and understand clearly what we have been studying in these two lectures. There are several things I want to point out. One is that when we read Buddhist scriptures, it is necessary for us to know at what kind of historical stage each sutra was told—to know, in other words, who spoke the scripture.

For instance, when Westerners started to study Buddhist scriptures, they thought they were a kind of myth. That may be so, a kind of myth, nothing but a myth. If someone studies a scripture literally, without knowing what kind of background the scripture has, and if someone has compiled the scripture in a very emotional way, the description will be very mysterious. So we should know what kind of people described Buddha in this way, and whether this sutra is based on Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna teaching. I am not comparing, and I am not saying which is better. But we should know with what feeling, and what kind of attitude, this scripture was presented, or else we will not understand what it is.

The same is true of the way you treat things and people. Without knowing who a person is, we cannot help him; without knowing what things are, we cannot treat them properly. When you know who made this tea bowl and what kind of history this tea bowl has, then you can treat the tea bowl properly. If you handle it without knowing who made it and what kind of tradition it has, it may be just a bowl; it doesn't make any sense.

So it is necessary to know how this tea bowl appeared here, in front of me. And at the same time, it is necessary for you to know whether this tea bowl is suitable for this season or not. Even though it is a very traditional and valuable one, a summer tea bowl cannot be used in winter. So you should know, at the same time, whether this is suitable for this season and suitable for the guest. And you should choose the tea bowl accordingly.

So we should arrange the teaching this way, and, according to the time and occasion, you should choose from the various teachings. But that is not enough. You should also know the history, or tradition, of each teaching. Then you can use the teaching in its true sense.

This way of doing things is, in other words, the four vows. This kind of effort will be continued forever. I am not forcing you to follow our Japanese way at all, but you should know how Buddhism was extended from Buddha to us. This is a very important point. The other point is to understand whether this kind of teaching will be effective enough to use right now, like a tea bowl. To arrange the teachings this way [moves hand horizontally] is not good; to arrange the teachings this way [moves hand vertically] is not good enough either. When you arrange the teachings this way [motions vertically], and choose one of them, and when you arrange the teachings this way [motions horizontally], the historical or traditional way, and understand the characteristic nature of various teachings, then you will find out what kind of teaching you should apply. That is why I am telling you what kind of nature this sutra has and who spoke this scripture.

The point is not whether this *Lotus Sutra* was told by the historical Buddha, or by some other person. As long as you attach to the historical Buddha too much, you cannot understand Buddhism. Buddha was great because he understood things in this way. How do we know Buddha had this kind of attitude towards things? Even though we do not have very much historical material, we do have quite a bit. We can study Hīnayāna Buddhism and pre-Buddhistic material and ask how pre-Buddhistic thought became Hīnayāna teaching.

How did it? It is impossible for pre-Buddhistic teaching to be Hīnayāna teaching, so what was the bridge? The bridge was Buddha; Buddha made the bridge. When we realize this point, we see that the Hīnayāna understanding was not perfect enough. The Hīnayāna Buddhists made Buddha a pre-Buddhistic person. He was pushed backwards to a pre-Buddhistic character.

So Mahāyāna students found that the Hīnayāna scriptures cannot be recognized as the main current of Buddhist thought. They are not the

main current. This kind of mistake always happens. We do not like sectarianism because that is Hīnayānistic. I always say that sectarianism is like having coffee in a coffee shop when you are going to San Francisco. You know, when you have a cup of coffee on the freeway, that is very good. But you shouldn't stay there. You should go on to San Francisco.

Emotionally, we like coffee shops and big banana splits. But that is Hīnayāna, you know. Even though it is good, we should continue on our trip. This is the Mahāyāna way—on, and on, and on. Usually people stopped at the coffee shop for many, many days—one or two weeks. But we cannot stay that long, because the coffee shop will not stay open that long. If it is not the main current, it will die, eventually, and only the main current will continue. So we don't have time to stay at the coffee shop very long. Once in a while, when we become sleepy, we must have some coffee. That is our way. With this attitude we should continue our trip. And if we want to continue our trip, the four vows are necessary. At any rate, we should continue our trip as long as our car goes. This is our attitude and our practice.

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This transcript is a retyping of the existing City Center transcript. It is not verbatim. The City Center transcript was entered onto disk by Jose Escobar, 1997. It was reformatted by Bill Redican (7/17/01).